United Nations E/CN.5/2012/NGO/8

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
17 November 2011

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Fiftieth session
1-10 February 2012
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by the International Federation on Ageing, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2012/1.

11-59759 (E) 081211

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Statement

Eradication of poverty is the greatest global challenge facing the world today. If it is to be successfully addressed, a long-term sustained response from all levels of government to eliminate its root causes is called for. This need was first recognized in 1995 as one of the three pillars of the World Summit for Social Development. More recently, the placement of poverty reduction as the first of the Millennium Development Goals has brought not only global awareness to this critical issue but also brought about gains in its achievement. However, the global economic climate since 2007 has presented new challenges to the continuance of these gains. With both developed and developing countries affected by the financial and economic crisis, the capacity to achieve poverty reduction has suffered an adverse impact. New strategies, new approaches and new policies are called for.

We know that the impact of poverty is more than a lack of financial resources; it is a threat to health, well-being and dignity. It isolates and marginalizes. It is a challenge to human rights. Unrelieved poverty presents an impenetrable barrier to the ability of those living in it to participate fully in society.

In 2001, the Economic and Social Council (E/C.12/2001/10) recognized this in defining poverty as a "sustained or chronic deprivation of the resources, capabilities, choices, security and power necessary for the enjoyment of an adequate standard of living and other civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights". This definition was echoed in article 5 of the political declaration adopted by the 163 Governments attending the Second World Assembly on Ageing in Madrid in April 2002.

How do older people become impoverished? Some are born into poverty and, because of lack of opportunity for education and training, never emerge from it. Others become impoverished through a variety of factors. In developed countries, the loss of employment or the onset of illness can lead to poverty. In developing nations, the lack of income security programmes coupled with weakened family supports, often undermined by war, civil strife and emigration, exacerbates the economic situation of older persons.

Regrettably, no worldwide database on the extent of poverty among older persons exists. Nonetheless, it is well-known that the most vulnerable among them, women, minority and indigenous groups, and the disabled, are disproportionately affected. It is also important to recognize that elder poverty is worldwide, present in developed as well as developing nations. Indeed, in the United States of America over 4 million older persons live in poverty, and in this city alone, one out of every five are impoverished. Such information is not, however, available for many nations. In order to address the issue of poverty among older persons, it is critical that mechanisms be developed to obtain data that can be disaggregated by age and sex. Such indicators are essential in enabling the development of policies and programmes to benefit a nation's poorest citizens.

But there are steps other than the creation of a database that can begin to reduce poverty among older persons. At the international level, policies and programmes directed at social development as well as sustainable development and poverty eradication must acknowledge the increasing numbers of older persons worldwide and ensure that they are able to benefit from these efforts. At the national level, the adoption of income security programmes, if they do not exist, is ideal.

However, where this is not feasible at this time, access of older persons to employment and income-generating opportunities, such as microfinance ventures, should be promoted. Where income security programmes do exist, nations should ensure that these benefits are received by all those eligible for them. In all poverty eradication strategies, the particular needs of women, the oldest old and disabled elderly should be specifically targeted.

In conclusion, all older people deserve to be full participants in their societies. Achieving that participation mandates a decent standard of living and the recognition of the value and worth of older citizens. To achieve this goal requires the commitment of all stakeholders working together to eradicate elder poverty as well as the strong, unshakable political will to undertake the difficult tasks ahead.

The International Federation on Ageing reiterates its commitment to all stakeholders to work together in the efforts to attain this common goal.